

Friendships, Social Skills, and Adoption



By Julian Davies, MD (Pediatrician)
Center for Adoption Medicine, Seattle WA

In our practice we see an unfortunate number of children with friendship problems. It can be one of the more painful issues that arise for our clients. But there is also hope - some good resources are available to help children with social skills difficulties, and there is much that parents can do to help.

What we hear from some of our families is that their children “feel” younger than they are, and gravitate towards younger children, or are more drawn to adults than peers. It can be hard for them to “share” conversation; they may divulge too much personal information, or have difficulty finding interests in common. They may have trouble joining their classmates in play. They often lack a sense of how to be a good host when having friends over (controlling the play, etc). Boys may take things too far, getting too rough or out of control. Girls may be clingy or bossy. Children may not get invited to play-dates or parties, and may lack a good friend.

Childhood friendship problems is a topic that raises strong feelings in many adults. I don’t know anyone that had a perfectly socially successful childhood, and just reading the previous paragraph can bring up memories of loneliness and rejection. When we see our children having such difficulties it’s truly challenging to stay present and clear-minded about what’s going on. But it is important to find a balance of appropriate concern and involvement. Blaming the peer group, assuming things will be better in another school, or otherwise neglecting the issue isn’t helpful; neither is overreacting, anxious hovering in social situations, or trying to bribe or force other children to include your child.

Causes of Friendship Problems in Foster and Adoptive Kids

Social skills problems in the context of foster care and adoption have not been well-researched, but the causes likely lie in a combination of:

- Lack of early secure attachments leading to more anxious/controlling behaviors in later relationships
- Rough and unsupervised early interactions with peers
- Poor social boundaries and judgement, difficulty reading others’ social cues
- A higher prevalence of impulsivity, ADHD, and externalizing (acting-out) behavioral problems
- Poor emotional regulation (quick to anger at perceived slights and rejection, etc)
- Delayed social/emotional development
- Challenges in social communication and language, making it hard to keep up with the increasingly fast-paced world of their peers

These risks are not shared by all of the adopted children that we see, but they are more common. In the world of social skills interventions, many of the participants are children (boys, usually) with ADHD, acting-out behavioral problems, or autistic spectrum issues. If you substitute “institutional autism”, or general lack of appropriate formative social experiences, that’s a combination of issues that fits many adopted and fostered children.

Patterns of Peer Problems

The literature on social skills problems in general suggests that there are a few patterns of peer problems that are most worrisome, and deserving of intervention. Researchers in this field often categorize children by interviewing their peers to come up with how liked (or not) and influential they are. This all sounds a bit harsh, but no one knows better how children are doing socially than their peer group, and the categories that follow aren’t nearly as hurtful as peers can be. In this research context, children are grouped as:

- Average (well-enough liked and influential)
- Popular (desired as a friend and influential)
- Neglected (not influential)
- Controversial (both liked and disliked, also influential)
- Rejected (disliked)

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Interestingly, “popular” as derived from peer ratings is not the same as just asking who’s popular. The “sociometrically popular” kids are well-liked, good problem-solvers, and trustworthy - a good friend. The “popular kids” are actually seen as dominant and “stuck-up”. Neglected children may be shy or less motivated to join peers; they seem to do well academically, and can start over in new groups and shed the “neglected” status. “Controversial” children are sociable but tend to use more social aggression and hostility; this also may not be a very stable peer group over time.

Rejected Children

But the “rejected” group is the most concerning. Children with rejected status in one group tend to be rejected in new groups as well. Without intervention, they are likely to stay rejected over time, and are more likely to have later difficulties with delinquency and adult maladjustment.

Children who are classified by observers as socially withdrawn, plus rejected by peers (thus, not withdrawn by choice), are more likely to have internalizing problems like depression and anxiety. There are two sub-groupings of boys who are “rejected”: rejected plus aggressive (verbal aggression, rule-breaking, etc), and rejected with odd, immature, or “quirky” behaviors. The rejected-aggressive boys are more likely to have academic difficulties and ADHD. Girls have rates of rejection similar to that of boys, but are a lot less likely to be referred to social skills interventions; it may be that rejected boys stand out more and have more externalizing behaviors, while rejected girls have fewer overt problem behaviors.

If this sounds like your child, you should consider learning more about how to help your child with play dates and friendships (since you’ve got the potential to make a big positive impact), and explore local options for social skills groups. Here are a few tips:

Help Your Kids with the Basics of Social Interactions

- Teach your child appropriate social greetings-and-responses, and what degree of physical contact is appropriate for whom (how not to be a “space invader”)
- Encourage and model use of positive statements like praise and agreement
- Help your kids learn to share a conversation (reciprocity)
- Practice these skills over and over and over

Help Children have Frequent, Successful Play Dates

- For younger/less mature children, having shorter, more structured play dates can help
- Practice being a good host beforehand, and come up with possible activities that their guest may enjoy
- When it comes to games, emphasize shared fun over winning/losing, and “good sport” behaviors (make sure to model these as well!)
- As a parent, stay aware of how things are going without hovering

Support Your Child in Making and Keeping Friends

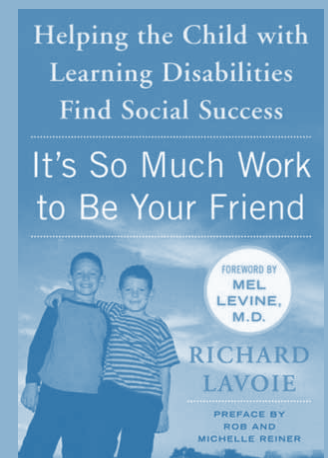
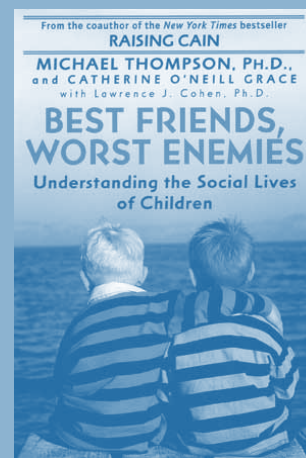
- Make friends with neighbors with children, allow your kids to get to know each other
- Get to know the parents of your kids potential friends (and enemies!)
- Make your child’s friends feel welcome in your home (greet them warmly, compliment them directly and to their parents when they pick them up)
- Socialize across generations: make time for extended family, hang out with other entire families together, look for a range of ages for your child to get to know. Such shared family gatherings can provide models of interaction, unhurried time for children to get to know each other, and can keep parents in touch with how their kids are doing socially.

Help Your Children Deal with the Pain of Rejection

- Remember that some pain around peer issues is inevitable and a normal part of childhood; try not to overreact or get too caught up in your own issues
- Don’t nurture resentments, add fuel to feuds, or attempt to coerce other children into including your child
- But do employ “active listening”; acknowledge and reflect back the emotions that you see your child having
- Once your child feels heard and understood, help your child with self-soothing strategies like deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and active play
- If bullying at school is involved, insist that it be appropriately addressed; most schools these days have policies, if not effective interventions, in place to deal with bullying

Resources for Families

One book for parents that I’ve really liked is “Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children”. Several of the tips above come from this book, which deftly summarizes the research about how children’s friendships evolve as they mature, and has solid suggestions for each developmental stage. Another book is “It’s So Much Work to Be Your Friend: Helping the Child with Learning Disabilities Find Social Success”.





VARIETY AMP CAMP 2014

JOIN AMP FOR A WEEK OF FUN AND LEARNING!

Variety AMP Camp will be held from July 20 to July 26 at the Iowa 4-H Center in Madrid, Iowa. Thanks to the generosity of Variety the Children's Charity, this will mark the second year of camp for youth in out-of-home-placements. There will be openings for 29 youth, (ages 13-18) who will be joined by 10 mentors from Aftercare and PAL programs. The focus will be leadership building and making successful transitions to self-responsibility. All activities will focus on building healthy, active, and involved AMP leaders. Campers will also participate in camp activities geared toward teens and today's technology. Campers will share their personal story with other campers and staff with the goal of building personal pride and hope for a brighter future.

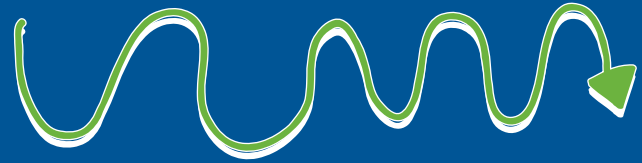
TO APPLY:

Applications will be available the first week of April. Contact the AMP facilitator closest to you to apply, find AMP council locations on the AMP website: www.ampiowa.org.

HEAR FROM LAST YEAR'S ATTENDEES:

To view a short video of last year's camp experience, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3c2AnfvGys>. To view additional camps videos, visit the AMP website (under the "Happenings" section)!

2013 VARIETY AMP CAMP ATTENDEES



KEEPING SIBLINGS CONNECTED

How to Build and Maintain Sibling Connections When Placed Separately

- Arrange for face-to-face visits at least two times a month.
- Foster parents, adoptive parents, and social workers should help the children initiate contact. Do not wait for the children to do it.
- Families can put pictures up of siblings in their home.
- Include information about siblings (known and unknown) in children's lifebooks
- Have the children see the same therapist on the same day. They can visit in the waiting room and have lunch or dinner together after. The therapist can make recommendations based on information on all the children.
- When visiting the birth parents, add extra time after visiting time so the children can play and process the visit together.
- Have foster/adoptive parents provide respite for siblings of the children they foster or have adopted.
- Play games and use other techniques that encourage siblings interaction during visits.
- Invite siblings to share birthday's, ball games, dance recitals and more.
- Go on vacations together.
- Gather all the siblings for a family portrait.
- Use email and letters. Parents and workers should provide pre-addressed and stamped envelopes, if necessary.
- If possible, place siblings in the same community. Even if the children are not able to live together, they will be able to visit each other easily. Also, be sure to send pictures at least yearly, so the child understands that their siblings are growing up too.
- For the siblings that the children cannot visit or do not know, make a "Sibling Box". Let the child put cards, pictures, drawings, and small gifts in a pretty box to give to the sibling if and when they do have contact.
- Add missing siblings to the holidays. For example, have a ornament on the Christmas tree for the missing sibling, have a cake on their birthday or light a candle on a special day. Create rituals.

SOURCE: *Adopting the Hurt Child: Hope for Families with Special Needs Kids* (Written By: Gregory Keck & Regina Kupecky)



Are You Ready for Graduation and What Comes Next?

High school graduation season is quickly approaching. Many of you are busy preparing for this milestone, but have you thought about what comes after graduation? Are you and youth in your care prepared for what comes next? Make sure that young people are aware of the services and support available from the Iowa Aftercare Services Network (IASN) for youth who exit foster care near their 18th birthday. These voluntary services are designed to help foster care alumni move toward stability and self-sufficiency in six key areas: education, employment, housing, health, life skills and relationships. Participants meet at least twice a month with a Self-Sufficiency Advocate (SSA), who partners with youth to help them address barriers and develop skills to achieve their individual goals. In addition, needs-based financial support up to **\$602.70** per month is available to youth who qualify for the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program.

Contact Aftercare Services Now

Aftercare Services should be contacted several months prior to a young person's planned exit from the foster care system. Aftercare SSAs are available to attend Family Team Decision-Making meetings, Dream Teams, or other events related to a young person's transition from care. Involvement prior to discharge helps SSAs build a relationship with eligible youth and facilitates a connection to Aftercare services. Prior to leaving foster care or any time after aging out, call 800-443-8336 to be referred to an IASN provider.

For more info, call the Youth Policy Institute of Iowa at 515-727-4220 or visit their website www.iowaaftercare.org.

Iowa KidsNet's New Website Offers New Feature to Families

Iowa KidsNet is excited to announce its new website! It's still at the same address – <http://www.iowakidsnet.com> – but with a whole new look. The new site is designed to make it easier for people to learn about the foster care path that's right for them, whether it's foster care, relative care or adoption.

One great new resource is a feature for approved families who are interested in adoption. You can now build a family profile right on the Iowa KidsNet website where you can share information and photos of your family with DHS adoption workers. DHS adoption workers will also be able to login to the site and search for families who could be a good fit for a child who needs a home. (This portion of the site is password-protected, and your profile can be viewed only by DHS and Iowa KidsNet staff).

Here's how it works. You start by requesting a login to create your personal account. Then your family will fill out an online form that allows you to share about who your family is, what you like to do together, the community where you live, your family's strengths and more. You can also upload up to three photos of your family. You can edit this information at any time. If a DHS adoption worker would like to talk with you about a waiting child, he or she can contact you using the information you list in your profile. This is a great way to introduce your family to DHS adoption workers who don't know you.

If your family has already completed a paper profile with Iowa KidsNet in the past, you have two options. KidsNet would be happy to transition your existing paper profile to the website system for you. Please email PAS@iowakidsnet.com for assistance. However, if your home has experienced changes since you completed your paper profile, it may be of benefit for you to complete a new one with your most up-to-date information.

This resource is for Iowa families with an approved home study who are interested in special needs foster care adoption. This means caring for children with special considerations such as sibling groups, teens, children with emotional or behavioral disorders, children with a history of sexual abuse or other factors. If you aren't sure if this resource is right for you, please contact Post Adoption Support at PAS@iowakidsnet.com. KidsNet would love to help.

If you are ready to get started, you can request a login. There may be a child waiting for whom your home would be a wonderful match. Iowa KidsNet looks forward to seeing this resource grow as they begin registering families and DHS adoption workers on the site throughout the year. If you have questions about this resource or need assistance, please email Kara Magnison at PAS@iowakidsnet.com.



A Different Home:

A Time of Trauma and Loss for Foster Children

Written By: Dr. John DeGarmo, Foster/Adoptive Parent & Author

It was late, and I was at my desk in my library, doing some writing for an upcoming book. Earlier that afternoon, we had taken in three foster children, all boys, ages ten, nine, and seven. As I sat over my keyboard, the sounds of crying wafted through from the nearby bedroom, instantly reminding me of the deep sadness that lay heavy in our house. Silently entering into the boy's room, I found Derrick, the youngest sitting in his bed, with tears streaming down his face. Between heartbroken sobs, he asked me when he could go home. "I want muh Momma," he sobbed. "When kin I go home? I don't wann be here." Matt and Logan were asleep, or at least pretended to be.

Once again, all my training as a foster parent failed me, as I could not prevent this boy from experiencing the fear, grief, and sorrow that gripped his small body. Scooping him in my arms, I carried him to the library and sat down next to the pot belly stove. What could I say to him to make him feel better? What could I do to take away his fear and sadness? My heart cried out to him, as I shared his own misery. This poor boy; this scared, lonely, poor boy. Once again, I felt the anger swell inside me; anger that parents could do this to a child, anger that those who were to love him the most had placed him in this situation with their own actions and their own choices. Saying a silent prayer to myself, I then stroked his hair. "I know, Derrick, I know," I whispered to him, wiping the tears that reddened his eyes.

Many psychologists state that it is necessary for young children to form a relationship with at least one main parental figure or caregiver in order for the child to develop socially and emotionally. Yet, the removal of a child from his or her home, and placement into another's home through foster care, often makes this a difficult, traumatic experience. Often, the removal of a child from a home occurs after a caseworker has gathered evidence and presented this evidence to a court, along with the recommendation that the child be removed. Indeed, most foster care placements are made through the court system.

Without a doubt, one of the hardest parts about being a foster parent for me is the emotional turmoil and trauma a child experiences when first placed into our home. The children are often times confused, and full of fear of the unknown. As distressing as this may be for a child, even more traumatic may be the removal from the child's birth home comes without any notification. These emergency removals oftentimes occur late in the evening. As caseworkers remove

a child from a home suddenly, most are unprepared. Foster children leave their home with a quick goodbye, leaving behind most of their belongings, with a few clothing and perhaps a prized possession hurriedly stuffed into a plastic bag. Before they know it, they are standing in front of you, strangers, people they have never met before. Against their will, they are in a strange home, their new home. For most, it is a time of fear, a time of uncertainty, a time where even the bravest of children become scared.

Sadly, it is not uncommon for newly placed foster children to cry themselves to sleep during the first few nights. Do not be surprised if this happens. He may be scared and lonely. Let him know that you understand how difficult it is for him, and that his tears are normal and all right. Read to him a bedtime story each night; place a nightlight not only in his room, but in the nearby bathroom, as well. Let him know that he can get up in the night and use the bathroom whenever he needs to. Answer his questions as honestly and as openly as you can, and be prepared for his emotions to bubble over, to burst forth, and to overwhelm him. After all, this is a very frightening time for him, a time where he is simply afraid.

It is for this very reason that I wrote my newest book, ***A Different Home: A New Foster Child's Story***. As a foster parent, I have struggled trying to ease the anxieties and concerns of many children from foster care when placed into my home. There have been countless nights where my wife and I have tried to comfort a crying child; a child who only wanted to go home, yet could not understand why he could not. It is my hope that ***A Different Home: A New Foster Child's Story*** is a book that foster parents and caseworkers can pull off the book shelves, and read it to their foster children during those first few nights of placement, those first few nights of anxiety and tears.

It takes great patience, understanding, and compassion to be a foster parent. During the first few nights of placement of a child into a foster home, it also takes a great deal of love. May you continue to love your foster child, and may we all continue to comfort them as they experience the loss of their own family when they move to ours.

Join the thousands who receive Dr. DeGarmo's FREE weekly foster care newsletter. Visit Dr. DeGarmo's website to sign up: <http://drjohndegarmofostercare.weebly.com/>.

IFAPA TRAININGS

SUPPORTING HEALTHY ATTACHMENT ACROSS THE DEVELOPMENTAL SPECTRUM

This course will empower foster and adoptive parents with concrete, practical tools as well as explore attitudes and values we can use with our youth across the developmental spectrum—from babies (including in utero) to teens and young adults. Brain research from a variety of disciplines will be presented to enhance our understanding and validate the practices. There is much we can do to empower our ability to attach emotionally to individuals, families, groups, and the community—and to enhance our connection and success with all the children and youth in our lives. (Trainers: Lois Smidt and Krista McCalley)

Sat., Apr. 26 (9am-4:30pm) – CLARINDA

DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL/SOCIAL COMPETENCY IN CHALLENGING INFANTS AND TODDLERS

This three hour session will aid participants in more fully understanding the ramifications of trauma even before birth, as well as how trauma manifests in babies and toddlers. Practical techniques will be offered so as to enhance the chances of early developmental healing of the social/emotional deficits of children placed in our care. (Trainer: Kim Combes, LBSW, M. Ed.)

Sat., May 10 (9am-12:15pm) – WATERLOO

TRAUMA: AN INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

Matthew grew up in a background of trauma and loss. This course will give the audience an “insider’s” perspective of what it’s like to grow up in an environment of fear and uncertainty of the future. With the help of his father, IFAPA trainer Kim Combes, Matt has put together three hours of cutting edge information regarding trauma, the brain and relationships. Matt will also do a Q and A discussion where participants can gain more insight into the world of their own traumatized foster/adoptive children. (Trainers: Matthew Lopez-Combes and Kim Combes, LBSW, M. Ed.)

Sat., May 10 (1:30pm-4:45pm) – WATERLOO

REAL HELP FOR ATTACHMENT STRUGGLES

Are you struggling with raising a child who: Always has to be in control? Is extremely demanding or clingy? Turns everything into a battle? If this sounds familiar, then you may be raising a child with an attachment disorder/reactive attachment disorder. These children resist tender, loving interactions and instead focus on stirring up conflict as a way of controlling their environment. Traditional parenting techniques just don't work with poorly attached and reactive attachment disordered children. This three hour training will include: background information and probable causes, understanding attachment disorder, therapeutic parenting strategies, therapeutic respite, therapy options, personal stories, videos of actual clients and their families showing successes and changes, working with the school, relatives, and friends in order to stop triangulation, and how to end the destructive cycle of power struggles in order to draw kids into loving, nurturing interactions. (Trainer: Marty Wallace, LMHC)

Sat., May 10 (9am-12:15pm) – ANKENY

SAFE HOMES: UNDERSTANDING AND PARENTING YOUR LGBTQ YOUTH

The purpose of the Safe Homes training is to educate parents so they can be supportive individuals and provide safe, comfortable homes for LGBTQ youth in foster care placement. Participants will learn about the history of the LGBTQ movement, identity terms and definitions, the process of “coming out” and common myths about LGBTQ youth. Parents will learn tips on communication, same sex relationships, the importance of trust plus view a video by AMP youth to hear their personal stories of coming out to their family, losing friendships and how good it feels to have a Safe Home. (Trainers: Terri Bailey and Julia McGinley)

Sat., May 10 (9am-4:30pm) – COUNCIL BLUFFS

TO REGISTER FOR A CLASS:

800.277.8145 ext. 1 / www.ifapa.org/training/training_registration_form.asp

PUTTING THE MYTHS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS ON CHILDHOOD SLEEP DISORDERS TO BED

Sleep is vital to our health and ability to lead successful lives; however, sleep is often misunderstood. When we don't sleep well it affects all other aspects of our world. This course will address healthy and developmentally normal sleep as well as red flags that signal there might be an issue. Together we will explore the three major categories of childhood sleep disorders, dyssomnias, parasomnias, and psychiatric/medical. Included in our discussions will be nightmares, night terrors, nocturnal enuresis, sleep-onset association disorder, separation anxiety and more. Good sleep hygiene techniques and ways to make sure that everyone in the house is getting enough rest will also be discussed! (Trainer: Joann Semann Smith, PhD)

Sat., May 10 (9am-4:30pm) – IOWA CITY

ANGER DE-ESCALATION

This workshop explores the various primary emotions embedded within anger and the way they manifest themselves in foster and adoptive children's lives and in our own. Issues of separation, loss and grief will be presented as the genesis of anger demonstrated in foster/adoptive homes. A role-play will launch participants into the defusing stage, followed by great new, practical and easy-to-use methods of discipline to add to a parent's strategy toolbox, all helpful in de-escalating anger in both kids and adults. (Trainer: Kim Combes, LBSW, M. Ed.)

Sat., May 17 (9am-4:30pm) – DAVENPORT

"QUIRKY KIDS": PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR LIVING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

Adopted children and children in foster care often come to us with significant behavioral problems. These may include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, aggressive behaviors towards others and/or other mental health problems. This session is designed to provide foster and adoptive parents with information about challenging behaviors in young children and to help parents develop more successful parenting strategies. (Trainer: Dorothy Lifka, LISW)

Sat., May 17 (9am-12:15pm) – AMES

FACILITATING ATTACHMENT IN FOSTER AND ADOPTED CHILDREN

Adopted children and children in foster care often come to us with significant trauma histories. Brain research has documented the negative effects such experiences can have on the developing brain and on the development of secure attachments to primary caregivers. Parenting strategies that work with other children may be ineffective and inappropriate for children with attachment issues and a history of trauma. This session is designed to provide foster and adoptive parents with information about trauma and attachment and to help them develop more successful parenting strategies. (Trainer: Dorothy Lifka, LISW)

Sat., May 17 (1:30pm-4:45pm) – AMES

SUMMER CLASSES

In addition to these classes, IFAPA also has classes scheduled in June, July and August. To view our summer training schedule, visit: www.ifapa.org/training/ifapa_training_schedule.asp

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Foster parents must complete all of their training requirements prior to the date listed below.

If you were licensed in the following month:	All of your training requirements must be completed by the following date:
July 2013	April 30, 2014
August 2013	May 31, 2014
September 2013	June 30, 2014
October 2013	July 31, 2014
November 2013	August 31, 2014
December 2013	September 30, 2014



6864 NE 14th Street, Suite 5
Ankeny, IA 50023
Toll-free: 800.277.8145
Dsm area: 515.289.4567
Website: www.ifapa.org
E-mail: ifapa@ifapa.org



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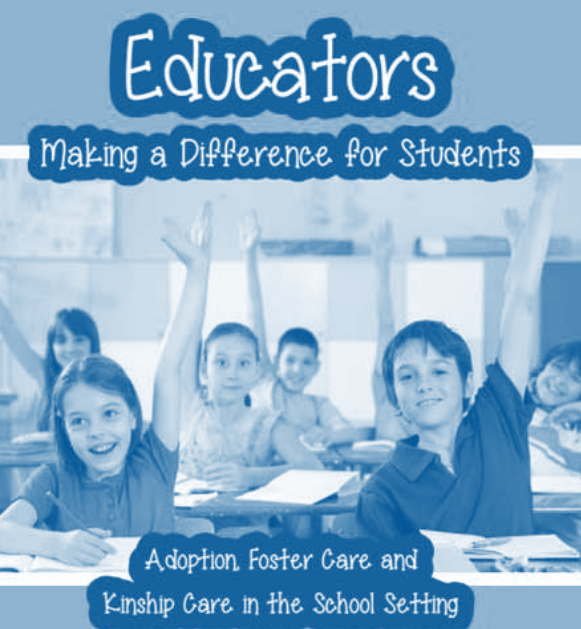


View Our
May Classes
on Pages
6 & 7



This NEW BOOK is flying
off our shelves!

Have you requested your
free copy to share with
your child's school?



IFAPA has published a new booklet for foster, adoptive and kinship parents!

Children who do not live with their birth parents deal with unique issues. These issues may affect a student's school performance. This booklet was developed to provide educators with information about issues that impact children and youth in out-of-home care and the effect those issues might have on classroom learning. Information and suggestions on how educators can assist and advocate for these students are also included.

Foster, adoptive and kinship families in Iowa can request a free copy (or multiple copies) of this book to pass on to their child's teacher(s). To receive your free copy, please e-mail cthomason@ifapa.org and include your name, mailing address and book quantity. This book is also available on our website at the following link: www.ifapa.org/pdf_docs/EducatorsMakingaDifference.pdf

Other Publications

IFAPA publishes a variety of resource materials for Iowa's foster, adoptive and kinship parents. Visit the link below to view IFAPA's entire list of publications available via mail for free. www.ifapa.org/publications/IFAPA_publications.asp

